

The T.L.S.

By Shirley M. Haws

There are times in the process of raising a family that can be very trying, and a mother would like to throw her hands in the air and give up in defeat. This has happened to me when each of my children have lost their front teeth. I have had a broad variety of experiences, and have drawn several conclusion from these that I hoped would help me when Eric, my youngest child, reached the T.L.S. (tooth loosing stage).

I started out with John, my oldest child, thinking (like most other young parents) that I knew all there was to know about bringing up children, and was convinced that in this modern scientific world the only way to get rid of a loose front tooth was to take him to the dentist and have him (with all his modern miracles) pull it. I made the appointment, and as soon as John got home from morning kindergarten, we proceeded to get ready to go. All the time I was getting dressed, he was yelling, "I won't go, he'll hurt me!"

By the time I'd progressed to the stage of combing my hair, he had begun to cry. As I pulled him out of the house and into the car, he was bordering on hysteria, and when I dragged him into the dentist's office and we tied him into the chair (the only way he'd stay), I had come to the decision that there must be a better way to get rid of a loose tooth. I had heard jokes about farmers who had put their children behind a mule and poked the mule in the flank until it kicked, but I wasn't so sure it wasn't more humane than the dentist method after all.

By the time David, my second child's turn came for the T.L.S., I had learned a little more, but not as much as I thought. I tried pulling the tooth with pliers, but though he was crying and screaming so hard his mouth was wide open, the pliers didn't fit into the small opening of his mouth well enough to get a good hold. When that didn't work, I tried tying the end of string on the tooth, the other end to the doorknob, then slamming the door. The problem with this was that he was

crying and kicking so hard that I couldn't get the string tight enough around his tooth to have it hold. After he bit my finger three times I gave up. David lost the tooth by going into a dark closet all by himself and wiggling it until it fell out.

Last month Laurene, my third child, came home from school with a loose tooth. Dread spread over me like a dark shadow. I had known it would come, but tried not to think about it, and now here it was staring me in the face.

I said "Sister, don't touch or wiggle it, or eat anything hard, and maybe it'll tighten back up." Because of a chicken-hearted mother, my daughter had a loose tooth in her mouth for a month. I kept hoping it would fall out by itself, but that tooth clung on just as if it were concentrating on proving that it could hold out longer than me.

Last week, I thought it was weakening, because it was only holding on by one edge, but it stuck as determinedly as ever. When Laurene wiggled it back and forth this morning, I could tell by the scraping sound it made that the other tooth was growing right under it and it was now time to take steps. But in that direction? The terrorise faces of John and David came back to me as I remembered the methods I'd tried in the past, and one by one I rejected them all. About this time if there had been a mule handy, I'm afraid I may have been tempted.

We ate dinner at Grandma Haws's house, and Laurene ate the whole meal with the tooth hanging halfway out of her mouth, and if it hadn't been so determined to stick, she would probably have swallowed it with her food. Her Grandma kept coaxing her to let her pull it for her, but Laurene took a very firm stand for the negative.

As I dried the dishes and put them into the cupboard, I saw something, and an idea started to form. There was a roll of beautiful pink string sitting on one of the shelves. I took it down and out about a foot off, then I called Laurene, "Why don't we tie this around your tooth, and then you can pull it yourself!" Grandma Haws joined in with, "Oh, she's not strong enough. It takes a really strong person

to pull a tooth. I'll bet you a dime you can't." "Let's show her you can do it, Sister," I prodded. Well what with the coaxing and teasing and bright colored string she finally consented.

I picked the piece of string up and tied a slip knot in the very center, pulling the loop down to the size of a dime, then put Laurene on my lap. She was getting just a bit leery and I promised her that if it started to hurt I'd quit, but she had to be very quiet and hold her mouth open wide or I couldn't get the pretty pink string around her tooth.

The I added that if she pulled the tooth herself she could take the string and the tooth to show and tell tomorrow at school to show how she did it. This completely convinced her.

I slipped the loop of the slip knot over her tooth (making sure I didn't hurt her the least little bit), then I started pulling both ends of the string to tighten the loop around it. The string kept slipping down a little, so I had Laurene held it up to the top of the tooth as I tightened. This served several purposes. First, it made it so I could use both hands, and most important, it kept her busy and her mind occupied so she wouldn't become frightened. The if it hurt a little it would have been her fault. I tightened the string gradually pushing it to the top of the tooth, until it was beneath all of it but the stubborn corner that wouldn't let loose. I got it just as tight as I could without hurting her, then I handed the two strings over and told her to take her turn and pull it out.

She took the string ends into her hands then dropped them. "I'm too scared!" She was almost ready to cry. Grandma Haws said, "I knew you couldn't do it!" A look of determination came into Laurene's eyes, and she jerked the string. Out it came with the tooth tied to the middle of it. Blood started trickling down her chin, and she didn't know whether to laugh or cry. But Grandma's "Laurene, you did it!" was all she needed. A big grin spread over her face, and a sigh of relief escaped from me. We'd done it! I finally knew how to get rid of a loose tooth!

My dreams were shattered by Eric, my three year old, looking at the blood on Laurene's chin and saying, "Me, no pull my teeth that way!" My hopes sank slowly and I knew I would have to find another way. This one wouldn't work with Him. Well, I'd have to cross that bridge when I came to it. In the meantime, I'd just worry!